

Latina Faculty in the Labyrinth: Constructing and Contesting Legitimacy in Hispanic Serving Institutions

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the presence and experiences of Latina¹ academics in the U.S., especially those who serve in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Following the theme of this special issue related to Women of Color Faculty's *Testimonios* and *Laberintos*, we add to the notion of academia as a labyrinth (*laberinto*), suggesting that it is a pathway with many twists and turns, each of which presents an opportunity, a possibility, and of course, a responsibility. Based on a review of literature and a fresh analysis of some of our previous work, we employ critical neo-institutional (CNI) and intersectionality theories to examine the experiences of Latinas as they navigate this labyrinth.

We begin from the perspective that the post-second-

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ary field and academic careers unfold in spaces where multiple relations of power are always converging, and where naming and sketching out legitimacy is at the core of these power relations. To this end, we selected CNI and intersectionality lenses to help us analyze the experiences of Latinas in academia because each of these theories consider legitimacy a crucial resource in the higher education field: a resource for which academics are constantly struggling towards (Collins, 1986; Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales, 2012a; Stanley, 2007) and an ascription for which post-secondary institutions are constantly jockeying (Gonzales, 2013a; Morphew, 2009; Pusser & Marginson, 2012; Toma, 2012; Tuchman, 2009).

To illustrate Latina faculty in the academic *laborinto*, we move between these theoretical lenses and the literature to highlight the experiences, opportunities, and implications for Latinas serving in academia. We begin by describing our theoretical lenses, alluding from time to time, as to how they apply to the experiences of Latina faculty members in academia. Then, we present a review of research that documents the pathways on which Latinas begin their journey into the professoriate, and studies, many of which are *testimonios*, that point out how relations of power are always at work. Our intent is to showcase how these relations of power play out at the organizational level and at the individual level in particular ways for Latina professors. Ultimately, we suggest there are unique opportunities as well as implications for Latina women who occupy “multiple marginalities” (Turner, 2003).

Situating the Experiences: Theoretical lenses to observe *El Laborinto y Los Testimonios*

We situate the experiences of Latina faculty through two theoretical frameworks: critical neoinstitutionalism and intersectionality. Critical neo-institutionalism (CNI) was developed as a direct response to the overtly positivistic and scientific conception of organizational phenomena and recognizes the cultural and social relations that shape organizational fields, like higher education (Cooper, Ezzamel, & Willmott, 2008; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Phillips & Malhotra, 2008; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). With CNI, we are able to more precisely sketch out the field of higher education and highlight the power relations that maintain hierarchy and difference (Gonzales, 2013a; Morphew, 2009; Pusser & Marginson, 2012; Toma, 2012). In this way, it helps us reveal the walls of the *laborinto* Latina faculty and other women faculty of color must traverse.

Intersectionality, on the other hand, is a perspective that stems from the traditions of critical race theory (CRT), its variants, and feminist perspectives (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1986; Davis, 2008). Intersectionality helps us understand the journey of Latina faculty within the *laborinto* (Núñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011). The journeys, most efficaciously shared through *testimonios* (testimonies) show that individuals embody multiple facets of identity (e.g., gender, race, tenure status, marital status, sexuality) simultaneously (Hankivsky et al., 2010; Holvino, 2008; McCall, 2005; Oleksy, 2011) and that these facets are always intersecting with

different “arenas of investigation” (Anthias, 2013, p. 12). With intersectionality, we can call attention to the multiple interstices of power that Latina faculty have to negotiate, and how their negotiations as well as experiences are likely to differ based on their multiple, simultaneous contexts and identities as women academics of color. Below, we provide a more detailed overview of these two theories and how they help us situate the experiences of Latina faculty.

Critical Neo-Institutionalism: The Labyrinth

Although there are various discipline-specific forms of new institutionalism, the sociological application is the form most often applied to higher education studies (Morphew, 2000; 2009). This is probably because new institutionalism via sociology suggests that post-secondary organizations tend to respond to tacit cultural rules and myths (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Meyer & Scott, 1983) that promise acceptance, legitimacy, value, and prestige.

A central idea in NI is that organizations are situated in fields of layered, interrelated relationships that shape what legitimate performance should look like for that type of organization. Additionally, NI suggests that when organizational activities are difficult to measure, performance is likely to be underpinned and measured on a social and cultural basis. To this end, when Meyer and Rowan (1977) published their seminal NI paper, they centered “legitimacy” as a resource necessary for organizational survival (Meyer & Scott, 1983; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) and developed based on interrelated organizations and agencies that have historically held power to say what is normal, valuable, and so forth (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

Drawing from NI, Gonzales (2013a) suggested that multiple, interrelated constituencies develop “prescriptions for legitimacy” in the higher education field. Gonzales noted that such constituencies include peer and aspirant universities and colleges, professional and discipline based associations and organizations, the academic profession, itself, accreditation and ranking bodies, publication and grant making industry, government, and the general public. Thus, taking the insights from the literature we can lay out at least two layers of the field, or more precisely relations of power, which Latina faculty members must navigate: the macro and the meso. Although we present these as layers, it is important to think of them as having porous boundaries through which information and influence travels. We call the first layer the “Field/Macro” layer and the second layer the “Organizational/Meso” layer.

Field/Macro. The “field level” might be considered the broadest conceptualization of higher education. At this level, one might include state and federal policies that outline expected and acceptable outcomes for post-secondary education. Often, governments carry out such work through accreditation and related evaluative bodies (Rusch & Wilbur, 2007). Government can also decide what is legitimate in terms of curriculum or reading materials. For example, some state law(s) ban particular forms of ethnic/race based literatures and curriculum not only in higher education, but also generally. The field level also contains ranking bodies, such as *U.S. News*

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and World Report (USNWR), which define the prestige and value of post-secondary organizations. The rankings are increasingly influential on college and university behavior, and parental and student decision-making (Bastedo & Bowman, 2011; Epseland & Sauder, 2007; Sauder & Epseland, 2009). The field also includes the grant-making industry and publication outlets (Gonzales, 2013a). The grant-making industry, often funded by government, but also by private donors, decides what counts as knowledge and what research is deserving of support. Journal and publication outlets also constitute the field and researchers have shown that journal outlets can be gatekeepers (Stanley, 2007). Clearly, outlets can give accord to certain epistemological and methodological bents as well as to particular kinds of content (Hart, 2006; Hart & Metcalfe, 2010). The field also contains the academic professional communities that will eventually review and evaluate scholars at some point (either for publication, promotion, etc.).

Organizational/Meso. The organizational level, of course, is highly influenced by the sources that stretch across the broader field. For example, scholars have shown that many colleges and universities are influenced by ranking bodies and grant funding agencies (Bastedo & Bowman, 2011; Morphew, 2009; Tuchman, 2009). The widespread phenomena of mission creep/academic drift attests to this. Mission drift is the attempt by less prestigious universities to adjust their missions in ways that mirror the activities and orientations of post-secondary organizations that are deemed more prestigious. Thus, mission drift often devalues teaching only to stress publishing, especially in “top-tier” journals. These shifts can be extremely harmful to Latina faculty women who are often particularly interested in serving students and service to the community (Gonzales, 2012b; Murakami-Ramalho, Núñez, & Cuero, 2010). Thus, in many ways, perhaps the most important layer of influence is the department. The department as well as the college might saddle Latinas with extensive service and teaching loads, exploiting her as a token more than an equal colleague. In this way, at the department level, the Latina faculty member might be hypervisible and invisible at the same time (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Niemann, 1999; Turner, 2002; 2003). Since departmental relationships are the ones that faculty most often have to negotiate and because departments are the first evaluative bodies that examine faculty records, they represent especially important contexts for Latina faculty. Next, we situate Latina faculty experiences with more detail inside this field or *labyrinth* we have just described through the use of CNI.

Intersectionality: Testimonios of Multiple Identities

Intersectionality has roots in critical race theory (CRT) and critical feminism. Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (1986) pointed out that the multiple identities that we carry and that are ascribed to us matter, and they matter all at once in ways that liberal feminism and the greater Civil Rights movement failed to capture (Collins, 1986; McCall, 2005; Oleksy, 2011). Specifically, scholars writing in the critical race theory tradition have focused on the ways that individuals, who are inscribed

with multiple minoritized characteristics (such as being a woman of color from a working class background), intersect with powerful institutions, and how differential and blatantly marginalizing experiences and outcomes are often rendered. For instance, Crenshaw's (1989) writing was a direct response to the shortcomings of a legal system that relied on binaries which failed to capture the experiences and situation of Black women, for example.

Intersectionality adds to the CNI framework insights about the experiences of Latinas while moving beyond CRT by offering some analytical clues about how one might study the intersections of individuals and institutions of power (McCall, 2005; Anthias, 2013). As a framework, it is particularly amenable to the exploration of Latinas because it challenges those who choose to perceive Latinas/os in a reductionist, strictly linear (either/or) racial/ethnic spaces. As Montoya (1999) pointed out, there are several layers in a system of inequality for Latinas/os beyond gender and race, such as immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname. Among and at the intersection of these layers are constant questions of legitimacy.

Unfortunately, while many of today's applications of intersectionality focus on the multiplicity of individual characteristics, they often present individuals as if they only intersect with one system at a time. However, in this work, we lean on critical neo-institutionalism to suggest that higher education and academia are structured by layered organizational relationships that define what is legitimate as well as valuable. We accept that these relations are at work all the time, at the field, university, departmental, and individual level, and thus we turn to intersectionality to help us consider what this means for Latina faculty members.

The Role of Legitimacy within CNI and Intersectionality

As alluded to, both CNI and intersectionality theories are built on the assumption that legitimacy is at the core of social relations. Definitions of legitimacy, its dimensions, and its sources have been theorized and fine-tuned for the last thirty years or so. In this paper, we think about legitimacy as gaining acceptance. More specifically, we work with Deephouse and Suchman's (2008) references to professional and normative legitimacy: "Professional legitimacy refers to the legitimacy conferred by professional endorsement whereas normative legitimacy refers to that conferred by any audience on primarily normative grounds" (p. 53). This definition aligns well with our notes about the importance of departments and disciplines within academia. It is important to stress that we do not endorse the limited views of legitimacy, and in fact, our work is committed to understanding how such dominant notions of legitimacy can be reworked or resisted. This latter aspect aligns well with the agentic aspects of intersectionality theory. Thus, we use CNI to point out how prescriptions of legitimacy have been crystallized in the higher education field, serving as norms, or guide-posts so to speak, regarding what is acceptable and what is valuable within the higher education field.

While early theories of legitimacy were presented mostly positively, since

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scholars did not critically consider what the costs of conformity might be (Lawrence, 2008), some of the more recent writing on legitimacy/legitimization is anchored in concerns about the normative strictures that lie behind conceptions of legitimacy and how such definitions privilege some while marginalizing others (Gonzales, 2012a, 2013a; Lawrence, 2008; Rusch & Wilbur, 2007; Pusser & Marginson, 2012). To this point, legitimacy and its attainment are also key concerns that intersectional, critical race, and critical feminist scholars have grappled with (Collins, 1986; Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Stanley, 2007; Smith, 1987). Consider the following excerpt from Patricia Hill Collins' (1986) seminal essay on Black feminist thought, which highlights the centrality of legitimacy in intersectional thinking:

I place Black women's ideas in the center of my analysis for another reason. Black women's ideas have long been viewed as peripheral to serious intellectual endeavors. By treating Black feminist thought as central, I hope to avoid the tendency of starting with the body of thought needing the critique-in this case sociology-fitting in the dissenting ideas, and thus, in the process, reifying the very systems of thought one hopes to transform. (p. S17)

Collins helps us recognize that when studying the relations of power in academia, we must strive to situate ideas as well as people who may have been long viewed as peripheral as central/deserving of centrality.

Thus, critical neo-institutionalism helps us draw out with some specificity as to how definitions of legitimacy are developed and maintained within higher education, generally, and academia more specifically. On the other hand, intersectionality helps us to consider how Latinas' multiple identities shape one's experience in the various intersections or "arenas" (Anthias, 2013) that constitute higher education. These lenses and ideas guided our reading and subsequent discussion of Latinas' experiences in academia.

We begin by summarizing key information about the presence and distribution of Latinas throughout academia. Then, because we want to provide a focus on Latinas who serve in Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), we describe the role and position of HSIs in the field of higher education. By doing this, we simultaneously leverage the utility of both CNI and intersectionality by sketching a more specific picture of Latina faculty within HSIs. We then expand on the notion of legitimacy as we review the literature that documents the experiences of Latina faculty in the labyrinths of academia. We conclude by coming full circle to address the issue of legitimacy/processes of earning legitimacy and draw out implications for Latina faculty, especially those who serve in HSIs.

Adentrando el Laberinto: The Representation of Latina Academics

According to predictions by the U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000:

For every 100 Latina elementary school students, 54 will graduate from high school,

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11 will graduate from college, 4 will obtain a graduate or professional degree and less than 1 will receive a doctorate. (Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, & Solórzano, 2007, p. 1)

This statistic brings further specificity to the fact that Latinas remain one of the least college-educated subgroups. Kerby (2012) noted that: “In 2010, 30 percent of white women had a college degree or higher, compared to 21.4 percent of black women and a mere 14.9 of Latinas” (p. 5). However, research shows that when Latinas do successfully complete college, they are most likely to have begun their post-secondary journey in community colleges.

Specifically, women of color, including Latinas, tend to begin their post-secondary journeys in two-year colleges, or more generally, in less-selective institutions (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Rodriguez-Chapman, 2012). In fact, it is estimated that one-third (35%) of Latino baccalaureates were once community college students (Cataldi et al., 2011). There are a variety of reasons as to why two-year colleges may be the predominant starting point for Latina college students. First of all, two-year colleges are much more affordable. This is a key consideration because Kerby (2012) reported that women of color are disproportionately represented among low-income, post-secondary students. In fact, nearly 51% of Latina students were identified as low-income. Additionally, Latinas might also begin at two-year colleges because of their limited accessibility to college preparation coursework in the public schools that prepare them (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). Finally, Latinas may also carry responsibilities to take care of family, which might lead them to trade off between attending a more selective institution and choosing a less selective located nearer to their families (Núñez, McDonough, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2008).

Successfully transferring out of two-year colleges is a difficult feat that many low-income students and/or students of color, including women, do not achieve (Crisp & Núñez, 2011; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). However, when Latinas do transfer out of two-year schools, researchers have established that they, along with Latinos, often transfer into institutions that are less selective than for what they actually qualify (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009).

Regarding the four-year institutions that receive and/or enroll Latina women, Wolf-Wendel, Baker, and Morphew (2000) documented that the most productive institutions of origin for Latina baccalaureate degrees are comprehensive universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Additionally, Wolf-Wendel et al. (2000), showed that not only do comprehensive and Hispanic-Serving Institutions produce the most Latina baccalaureate degree holders, but HSIs also constitute the entry point for the majority of Latinas who go on to earn a doctoral degree (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Wolf-Wendel, Baker, & Morphew, 2000; Wolf-Wendel, 1998), making them particularly important places to study and explore in terms of Latina academic journeys.

Once in the professoriate, Latinas are likely to be one of very few within their

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institution. To this point, of the 1.4 million individuals that constitute the profession today, Latinas hold only 4% of all tenure-track positions (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wong, 2011). As rank increases, the number of faculty of color, including Latinas, decreases dramatically (Baez, 2000; Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009; Turner et al., 2011). In fact, according to *The Almanac* (2010), Latinas make up less than one percent (.6) of all full professors, meaning that when Latino/as enter the professoriate, institutions are not successful in retaining them to an advanced career stage. The lack of advancement is the first sign that Latinas may struggle to win legitimacy within academia (Turner et al., 2011).

Underrepresentation of Latinas is particularly acute among private four-year institutions and selective institutions. In fact, the less selective institutions that often serve as the pathways for Latina academics may very well be the kind of institutions in which Latinas eventually serve as faculty members, as Latino faculty members tend to be overrepresented in HSIs and underrepresented in more selective public institutions (Delgado & Villalpando, 2002; Perna, Li, Walsh, & Raible, 2010; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006; Solórzano & Solorzano, 1995).

Taken together, the research suggests that Latinas' journey into academia is like traveling through a labyrinth with many uphill climbs. It is highly likely that today's Latina faculty member began her journey in an underfunded public school system that lacked adequate college preparation coursework, only to find her way into a community college or a less-selective institution, maybe even a Hispanic-Serving Institution. These insights are important as we call upon the ideas of CNI in that Latinas often journey along a path that some might view as less prestigious or less legitimate with their community college beginnings and HSI endings (see Brint & Karabel, 1989; Gonzales, 2013a). They are also important from an intersectionality perspective as they highlight the various kinds of marginal positions that a Latina might occupy. In these ways, when Latinas enter academia, it is likely that they will have to continue to work especially hard to position themselves as valuable scholars (Niemann, 1999). These are ideas we continue to discuss throughout the article.

Of course, it is also true that some of today's Latina professors also journeyed through the more elite, selective institutions of higher education, perhaps bringing with them a heightened awareness of the ways in which race, gender, and class intersect to shape experiences within the field of higher education, given their lonely collegiate journey among ivory towers. Whatever their pathway, Latina professors must quickly learn to navigate this labyrinth we call academia. Once in academia, Latina professors find that they must work to secure spaces of legitimacy for themselves and their work, and while there are many constraints in doing so, there are also opportunities. Next, we describe a space where Latina faculty often serve: Hispanic-Serving Institutions. As with the current section, we make connections back to the theoretical framework.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

HSIs are defined by enrollment. At least 25% of their full-time equivalent (FTE), undergraduate student enrollment must be of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity (Laden, 2004). These special purpose institutions received a formal, federal boost of recognition and investment in 1998 in the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. In the Reauthorization act, the “Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions” program was introduced (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). The intent was to provide funds to develop the capacity of institutions serving large numbers of Hispanic students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). Accordingly, colleges and universities whose student enrollment was at least 25% Hispanic students (as defined by the federal government) became eligible for distinct pools of resources. Such resources included monies for facility development, student services, and research grants to support research that would enable a Hispanic-Serving designation (Núñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vazquez, *in press*).

In terms of academic mission, most HSIs are community colleges. Yet, many others are comprehensive universities and doctoral granting universities with less intense research production (Santiago, 2012). Like other comprehensive and/or regional research institutions, HSIs are influenced by the field’s prescription for legitimacy and prestige. Specifically, there is evidence that some HSIs are engaged in “mission creep” (Gonzales, 2013a; Murakami-Ramalho, Núñez, & Cuero, 2010), which is in line with O’Meara’s (2007) assertion that, “no institutional type is immune to the prestige” (p. 157) and legitimacy competition that dominates higher education. With their broad access, teaching centered missions, and regional rather than national orientations, HSIs are rarely, if ever, mentioned in discussions related to normative notions of prestige. Yet, there is some evidence that HSIs are willing to make changes that they perceive as necessary to enhance prestige. To conform in the name of legitimacy and prestige are important to a CNI analysis and they bring to light unique relations of power and tensions that not only the HSIU faces, but that Latina academics might have to work through even when situated in an organization that aims to reshape its mission.

Thus far, we have laid out and used our theoretical lenses to describe the journey and distribution of Latina faculty across academia. We also discussed the role and position of HSIs since these institutions very often house Latina academics. In order to further contextualize what it might mean for Latina faculty to serve in HSIs, especially in terms of legitimacy, we consider the wider literature on Latinas’ experiences in the labyrinth of academia. We believe this is helpful and points out how Latinas and HSIs move through and are a part of this larger labyrinth. We conclude with a discussion that folds insights from these various bodies of literature together.

Latinas' Experiences in the Labyrinth

Here, we describe some of the predominant themes that emerge in the literature on Latina faculty members' experiences. Most of these studies were conducted within Predominantly White (PWI) research institutions (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Ponjuan, 2006; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008; Turner, González, & Wong, 2011), but they can help us understand the experiences of Latinas in academia broadly while shedding light on implications for those who serve in HSIs, especially if HSIs, as some scholars argue, have yet to develop missions and cultures that distinguish them from PWIs (Contreras et al., 2008; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Núñez et al., in press; Santiago, 2009). Illuminated by the lenses of CNI and intersectionality, the discussion addresses issues of Latina identity, isolation, marginalization, and tokenism.

Negotiating *Latinidad*

One of the most significant themes that can be detected in the literature is connected to complexity and diversity among Latinos and Latinas. For example, a Latina faculty in the U.S., may be an American born of parents coming from Mexico, of Jewish descent, and may have blonde hair with blue eyes. Even though her cultural identifier is Latina, the intersectionality of identity, background, and cultural affiliation challenge her own identity as well as others' perceptions. On this note, Morales (2002) argued that "it is difficult to locate the essence of what it is to be Latino/Hispanic" (p. 1). Consider that two of the authors of this paper are of mixed heritage, one being a South American, third generation Japanese born in Brazil, and the other a second generation immigrant and daughter of a Colombian parent. In other works, these two authors have discussed how their phenotypical features intersect through others' perceptions in ways that challenge their legitimacy among Latino and Latina colleagues (Murakami-Ramalho et al., 2010; Núñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011). With regard to this tension, Núñez and Murakami-Ramalho (2011) examined how two mixed-heritage, Latina faculty members "who might be considered 'outsiders within' the Latina/o community (Collins, 1993) drew on their *Latinidad* as a source of strength for their academic work in advancing social justice for Latina/os" (p. 173), yet they also described how their membership within Latina/o community always had to be negotiated:

I have also learned that among Latina/o scholars from more mainstream backgrounds, I could be perceived as tolerable at best.... In other inquiries, these colleagues want me to articulate "what degree of *Latinidad* qualifies one as an authentic Latina/o?" (p. 184)

In this way, Latinas and Latinos have written about the ways in which they have to negotiate not only their professional careers among discipline, departmental and national peers, but also among Latino communities (Espino, Muñoz, & Kiyama, 2010; Espino, 2012; Núñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2012).

Of all the difficulties navigating within academia, perhaps it is the navigating and negotiating among one's own community that is the most complex to discuss. In doing so, Latina scholars illustrate that what should be among the safest space for Latinas, since they are still so few in academia, can also present challenges regarding "fit" or "legitimacy" within Latino cultural communities. In a very similar way, Collins (1986) also wrote about the cultural group being an additional set of relations that Black women have to negotiate. Espino, Muñoz, and Kiyama (2010) work through the difficulties, but also the possibilities, of merging academia and motherhood, particularly motherhood as it is defined by Latino cultural expectations. Of this, one of the scholars reflected "I am challenged by how to weave my academic and cultural worlds together, yet I am growing tired of reconfiguring myself to appease social and cultural traditions and expectations" (p. 808).

Similarly, Delgado (2009), a Latino, described many instances of negotiating legitimacy among multiple communities, including the Latino community. While Delgado failed to acknowledge the privilege he maintains among the Latino community as a male, he explained that his identity and fit as a Latino has been questioned on many occasions:

There are multiple...ways to experience and articulate Latina/o identity...What vexes is the constant question, Am I performing Brown in ways that create space or am I performing it in ways that allow me to fit in? These moments of uncertainty...most often arise when others find me complicit in the erasing of my Latino identity.... If the margins are what we occupy when we are Othered by the mainstream, what space is left when the marginalized marginalize each other? (p. 159)

To share such experiences must not be easy, yet a growing number of Latina and Latino scholars have expressed, through *testimonio*, that the struggle for legitimacy does not stop at the margins, even when among one's own community (Ek et al., 2010; Murakami-Ramalho & Núñez, 2011; Núñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011).

Walls of Isolation

Given Latinas' lack of representation within the professoriate and, more specifically, within major research universities, it is not surprising that in many places, Latinas are still the "first" and "only" within their departmental or college contexts (Delgado, 2009; Niemann, 1999; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Segura, 2003; Sule, 2011; Turner, 2002; Turner et al., 2008). In fact, one of the authors of this article was the first Latina to be hired into her department and remains the sole woman of color. Inevitably, this leads to distinctive feelings of isolation and loneliness (Aguirre, 2000; Astin, Antonio, Cress, & Astin, 1997; Anzaldúa, 1987; Jayakumar et al., 2009; Segura, 2003; Sule, 2011; Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). Turner (2002) described what being the only one, or a minority in isolation may look like. For example, a sole Latina would be more visible and on display, with more pressure to conform, and less room for

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error. She would also likely face misperceptions of her identity, be stereotyped, and have roles defined for her.

Isolation could also potentially impact a Latina's formation of identity. Specifically, according to Erikson's work (1946, 1956), identity is formed in two ways: through legitimizing sameness with oneself and legitimizing yourself with others. If students or faculty cannot find the opportunities to develop an academic identity and a sense of community that allows them to develop a sense of legitimacy, these individuals will feel isolated and doubt their value. Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin (2002) highlighted Erickson's work in their own arguments about the observed importance that higher education environments can have on individual identity formation. Additionally, isolation has been linked to high levels of stress and dissatisfaction, which are consistent predictors for faculty departure (Ponjuán, Conley, & Trower, 2011; Turner et al., 2008; Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). Isolation can render multiple difficulties for Latina faculty members who are so few in academia.

Roadblocks of Marginalization

In her seminal paper, Turner (2002) described how women of color live with multiple forms of marginality and how such statuses shaped their academic careers/experiences. Turner explained that when an individual occupies/embodies multiple forms of marginality (e.g., being a working class woman of color and a first-generation college student), one differs from the "norm" in academia in ways that cumulatively and often negatively press upon their careers. Since its publication, Turner's writing has informed many studies of women of color since then.

For instance, Latina and other women of color academics have documented how multiple divergences from the White, male, upper-middle class, multi-generational college-educated culture of academia results in their being left out of key opportunity and resource structures as well as general collegial activities and interactions (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey & Hazelwood, 2011; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Stanley, 2007). Niemann (1999) shared how colleagues in her own department, disturbed by her multiple identities asked her to vanquish them. Niemann described one such conversation:

What are you, a scholar or a Mexican American?" He said... 'the department is only interested in scholars, not Mexican Americans.' I replied that I didn't cease to be Mexican American by becoming a scholar any more than he ceased to be a man when he got his Ph.D. He retorted that 'it was not the same thing' ... (p. 116)

Niemann's work accomplished an important achievement. Specifically, when one acknowledges marginalization rather than discussing the lack of success or the lack of representation with demographic information alone, the researcher points to the problematic nature of "norms" in academia as well as their effects on groups that differ or challenge them.

Tokenization

While isolation is best understood as a sense of loneliness and marginalization stems from occupying multiple positions that mark one as different from the norm, tokenization is the exploitation of one's "non-normative" identities for the purposes of organizational ends. This is particularly true in higher education where colleges and universities are eager to boast of a diverse faculty (Delgado, 2009; Griffin et al., 2011; Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Jayakumar et al., 2009; Núñez & Murakami, 2012; Niemann, 1999; Sule, 2011). Tokenization, as defined by Kanter (1977), is when "individuals are treated as representative of [an entire population], as symbols rather than as individuals" (p. 208). When colleges and universities tokenize their faculty of color, particularly women of color, it yields a division of labor that can impede Latinas' success in academia.

For example, Latina faculty members describe extraordinary requests for service, which are based on the assumption that they can/should represent the entire Latino populations' perspective (Turner, 2002; Turner et al., 2008). Latina professors have reported that they are assumed to be the most appropriate, capable and most committed mentor for students of color, especially in the absence of other faculty of color (Turner, 2002). Niemann (1999) warns emerging scholars of color against accepting positions where they might be the only man or woman of color. Such situations could be especially difficult in an HSI where the faculty still consists of relatively few Latina and Latino professors.

The consequences of tokenization can be detrimental when it comes to retaining Latinas in academia, especially if Latinas, themselves, struggle to say no to service and teaching requests as the literature suggests (Aguirre, 2000; Antonio, 2002; Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Niemann, 1999; Sule, 2011). Without mentors who can clearly outline how and when to say no to particular requests, Latina faculty have described how they might easily spend all of their time teaching, mentoring, and carrying out service rather than focusing their efforts on scholarship (Niemann, 1999; Misra, Lundquist, Holmes, & Agiomavritis, 2011; Núñez & Murakami, 2011; Turner et al., 2011). However, even when scholars of color are able to focus on the production of scholarship, many have noted that the quality of their research is called into question, along dimensions of epistemology and content (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Stanley, 2007; Sule, 2011). We discuss this theme next.

Discounting Latinas as Scholars

There is a growing body of scholarship that highlights how Latinas' scholarship is discounted and dismissed by peers who have very narrow views of what counts as scholarship (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Foley & Valenzuela, 2008; Niemann 1999; Turner, Wood, & González, 2008). The discounting and explicit "devaluation" (Turner, Wood, & González, 2008) of Latina's scholarship is yet another curve in the labyrinth of academia. It is important to note that the devaluation

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of Latinas' scholarship happens regardless of the focus, but that it is particularly acute when Latinas focus on race, gender, and/or equity oriented scholarship. For example, Niemann (1999) explained that although she researched "mainstream" issues and published in "mainstream" journals, her colleagues never saw her or respected her as a scholar, only as an "affirmative action hire."

Furthermore, when Latinas do conduct research that is explicitly focused on issues related to social and racial justice, marginalization, or oriented towards community uplift, devaluation becomes acute and undeniable. Delgado-Bernal and Villalpando (2002) offered a counter-story to illustrate how a woman's scholar of color's work was called into question by one tenure and promotion committee. Delgado-Bernal and Villalpando explained that when scholars of color publish work that explicitly honors and reflects personal and political motivations, committees immediately critique on the basis of "objectivity." In doing so, committees (or reviewers, more generally) perpetuate the dominant idea that the personal and political should not touch the professional, which is a position that many scholars, especially scholars of color, do not adopt. In fact, for many scholars of color, joining academia is a political act in itself (Huckaby, 2008).

In this way, "objectivity," or "distance," are just a few of the dominant norms that guide academia. Stanley (2007) called such dominant norms master narratives and argued:

A master narrative is a script that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out....there is a master narrative operating in academia that often defines and limits what is valued as scholarship and who is entitled to create scholarship. (p. 14)\

Stanley (2007) explained that when marginalized groups, like women of color, produce knowledge, they often raise critical questions and interrogate taken-for-granted norms and master narratives. In turn, those who have traditionally constructed and reproduced such master narratives respond and a struggle towards legitimacy, acceptance, and value ensues (see Bourdieu, 1988; Collins, 1986; Gonzales, 2010). Questions about whose truths, whose methods and ultimately, whose knowledge is the knowledge that is acceptable and valuable emerge. Next, we describe a more hopeful theme that can be located in the literature that addresses Latina experiences in academia: the ways in which Latina faculty often take agency and enact transformative resistance in order to challenge predominant notions of what make for a legitimate academic and what constitutes legitimacy in academia.

Enacting Agency: Transforming the Labyrinth

Thus far, the description of Latina experiences in academia has been bleak. Yet in line with intersectional theory, there is recognition that sites of oppression and marginalization are also always sites of resistance and agency (Baez, 2000; Quijada-Cerecer, Ek, Alanís, & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011; Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Gonzales, 2012b; Núñez, Murakami-Ramalho, & Cuero, 2010;

Sule, 2011; Villalpando, 2004). Agency is when one takes actions in response to or in ways that challenge some set of norms or rules (see Gonzales, 2012a; Rhoades, Marquez, Quiroz & Kiyama, 2008; Sule, 2011).

Writing broadly about faculty of color, Baez (2000) was perhaps the first to write so explicitly about the ways that faculty of color might use service as a way to exert agency in academia. Baez conceptualized service as an opportunity to serve rather than as a problem to be solved, and a way that scholars of color that could begin to reform what is taken-for-granted as legitimate. Along similar lines, Gonzales (2012b) interviewed a small group of Latina faculty and found that they purposely chose to work in a place where they could serve students who shared similar histories to their own (working class, first-generation college students, recent im/migrant histories). These women were not so much concerned with the development of national reputations or “legitimacy” in the ways that the academic profession conventionally defines it. Instead, they were concerned with the advancement of Latino students and asserted that their aspirations were legitimate goals for an academic. As one Latina faculty member explained, “it has never been about me, but about my community” (p. 167).

Members of the University of Texas at San Antonio Research for the Educational Advancement of Latinas (REAL) collaborative (which two authors of this article are a part of), defined agency as transformative resistance and explained that such agency includes the political, collective, conscious, and motivational energy of individuals towards social change. One strand of research developed by REAL members included their own experiences becoming scholars in academia, where their acts of agency include purpose and intent to support each other as scholars and generate the success of students and other faculty of color (Murakami & Núñez, *in press*).

Quijada-Cerecer et al. (2011) further explained that, as a group, the Latinas at REAL have framed the intersectionality of gender, race, and class as an asset in their development as scholars, rather than as a deficit. Their approach underpins their “motivation and commitment to engage in transformative resistance in an environment traditionally known as male-dominant and Eurocentric” (Quijada, Ek, Alanís, & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011, p. 72). In another paper, Núñez, Murakami-Ramalho, and Cuero (2010) described how the members of REAL, all Latina scholars, asserted agency by developing support systems for their work, including informal mentoring and scheduled writing retreats. They purposely crafted space to do the work that allowed them to focus on community uplift and the pursuit of addressing the needs of Latinas/os in education. As such, they create space and support for one another and for the work that might be marginalized by mainstream norms, (Delgado-Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Stanley, 2007).

Realizing the need to craft spaces and definitions of legitimacy that aligned to their orientations, the REAL scholars built communities of support based on personal and professional identities. Núñez and Murakami (2012) offer specific ideas and advice as to how other Latinas or women of color might build similar support structures. Some of the suggestions included: (a) join together regularly

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with like-minded individuals and set common goals for coming together; (b) situate an institutional home for collective activities; and (c) engage senior faculty and administrators in these initiatives. We describe some of these activities below.

Joining with like-minded individuals and setting goals. REAL members met periodically for lunches to discuss their experiences and goals as faculty. In some of these lunches, full Latina professors would mentor the group to inform members about expectations for promotion and tenure. These senior faculty also encouraged REAL members to challenge the competitive nature of academia (Quijada-Cerecer, Alanís, Ek, Rodriguez, 2012), inviting group members to form joint research and writing projects. Subsequently, REAL members developed several distinctive and collaborative projects involving different subsets of the group.

Situating an institutional home for collective activities. REAL formalized its existence through situating the group in the university's Women's Studies Institute. The Institute provided opportunities to showcase REAL research during Women's History Month workshops. In addition, this unit provided a forum for REAL members to engage in pedagogical activities with colleagues at and beyond the university.

Engaging senior faculty and administrators in initiatives. To strengthen collaborative research efforts, REAL members applied for and received grant funding from administrative units for retreats to conduct research. These retreats provided opportunities for members to write together, critique one another's work, and collect data and literature about common research topics of interest. Furthermore, members of the group obtained funding from the provost's office to conduct a daylong Saturday professional development workshop in which members presented seminars to teachers and local educators about P-20 issues in Latino education. REAL scholars assumed significant responsibility to create spaces to contest predominant norms and definitions of legitimate scholars and scholarship. This group's activities serve as examples of how Latina faculty can exercise agency to challenge constraints and establish alternative ways of relating to one another and to their scholarship in the academy. Documenting these through testimonio is also an act of agency as it is a way of illustrating the possibilities of agency within academia.

Discussion

It seems that academia continues to be a space structured by power relations. Clearly, Latinas experience loneliness. Their frequent solo status makes them hypervisible and at the same time invisible. The hypervisibility often leads to their tokenization, which often translates into a workload not amenable to tenure and promotion processes. And when they do produce research, Latinas' scholarship, and often, their general approach to faculty careers is doubted, called into question, and devalued.

Yet, the literature suggests that the marginalization does not cease even among

the margins. To this end, among the most intimate of spaces with their own cultural community, Latinas might be “checked” for their fit, their legitimacy, and find themselves negotiating for space and acceptance. For instance, Latinas, who may not look, talk, or study like other Latina/o scholars, have to negotiate and sometimes prove the legitimacy of their *Latinidad*. In other words, the Latino community might doubt one’s belonging or one’s authenticity on the very same grounds that mainstream academia marginalizes a Latina: on the basis of looks, language, or even scholarship. These are additional twists in the labyrinth that Latina faculty journey through and an area where intersectionality theory could be particularly helpful.

Again, in different ways, these twists and turns that Latinas must negotiate concern the attainment and/or maintenance of legitimacy. We were particularly interested in speculating what this means for Latinas who serve in HSIs. Through both empirical and theoretical discussion, we pointed out how legitimacy not only concerns the individual Latina’s experience, but that “prescriptions for legitimacy” (Gonzales, 2013a) also operate to influence the department, discipline and university homes in which Latinas are situated. To this point, when we focused on Latina faculty and HSIs, we identified an organization that despite carrying an HSI designation is not thought to differ much from a PWI in the support and legitimization of Latina faculty (Contreras et al., 2008; Hubbard & Stage, 2009). Since all but three HSIs have evolved into their HSI designation by virtue of their geographical location (Cole, 2011; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Laden, 2004), their missions, histories, and practices have never been Hispanic-centered in the ways that Historically Black Colleges and Universities foreground African American culture and advancement (Hubbard & Stage, 2009). This means that if Latinas select to work in HSIs in order to advance their Latino community, they might find themselves in a difficult situation.

Following this line of thinking, we found that HSIs, especially four-year institutions, might also be susceptible to the predominant norms and prescriptions for legitimacy that characterize the higher education field (Gonzales, 2012a; 2013a). Emerging scholarship suggests that these HSIs might waver from their teaching and regional missions in order to enhance reputation by increasing research expectations for faculty, raising admission standards, and encouraging more national and top-tier research dissemination (Gonzales, 2013a). These shifts could be problematic for Latinas who are more likely to develop research agendas and work profiles that center on Latino related concerns as well as service to the community (Ek et al., 2010; Núñez & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011). Even when their research agendas are not explicitly focused on the Latino community, because they come from a marginalized position, they are likely to pose fresh, critical questions about relations of power (Scheurich & Young, 1997). For all of these reasons, it is important for scholars to consider the opportunities as well as the implications for Latinas who serve in HSIs rather than simply assume that HSIs represent spaces that are more amenable to the advancement of Latina faculty. Still, it is important to not forget how the HSI status and mass of Latina scholars influenced and enabled the REAL scholars to focus their work on addressing Latino and Latina access to education and opportunity and to do so by

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leveraging the rich assets that were theirs by virtue of their identities. Taken together, it seems that studying the Latina faculty experience inside HSIs really does require a multidimensional approach that can examine field level pressures and individual positionality. This is why we suggest that the dual employment of CNI and intersectionality is promising for future work.

Conclusion:

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

It is clear that across academia and the field of higher education, legitimacy is an important resource that Latinas, as women of color, seem to always be working in cognizance or towards. Using CNI and intersectionality lenses to examine Latina faculty members' experiences highlights how these faculty negotiate institutional legitimacy, as well as individual and community-oriented authenticity, in their positions. While some research has employed an intersectionality lens to understand the experiences of faculty of color (e.g., Griffin & Reddick, 2011), it has focused primarily on individuals' experiences, behaviors, and perceptions, rather than how these faculty negotiate institutional norms of legitimacy.

By employing CNI in addition to intersectionality, we can sketch out “arenas of investigation” (Anthias, 2013) at the field/macro and organizational/meso levels to examine the intersection of Latinas with the *laberinto* in more precise ways. Beyond the experiential arena that has been stressed in intersectional inquiry, these arenas include: (a) field based agencies and organizations such as the government, business, and ranking or evaluative bodies; (b) representational factors such as discourses around notions of legitimacy, prestige, and power, especially those that emanate from the disciplines and ranking bodies; and (c) intersubjective factors such as how individuals and groups relate to one another (Anthias, 2013). These are some, but not all of the dimensions that define the labyrinth that Latina faculty negotiate.

A few key questions which concern how Latina faculty employ a variety of strategies to negotiate institutional legitimacy while balancing the development of their personal and community authenticity emerge from this work. We need to ask, “Is it enough to assert agency in order to create and contest predominant norms of legitimacy? Can such agentic efforts lead to larger shifts in academia? How and who can support such efforts?” By expanding our discussion to the multiple ways that institutions construct a labyrinth for Latinas to navigate, we can also begin to identify institutional and collective strategies to support Latinas in their academic journeys. We hope that Latina faculty members continue to document their experiences through the powerful method of testimonio in order to help us sketch the nuances of the *laberinto* and the possibilities for reshaping it.

Note

¹ Latino is a pan-ethnic identifier that embraces the diversity among the Latino population in ways that Hispanic does not. The label Latino has become a panethnic identifier representing diverse national, linguistic, immigrant, phenotypical, and other backgrounds (Mora, 2013). We elect to use Latina in order to honor the diversity among this population.

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